

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	5 DECEMBER 2016	AGENDA ITEM:	13
TITLE:	BUDGET SAVING PROPOSAL - CONSULTATION RESULTS FOR CHANGES TO CONCESSIONARY FARES SCHEME		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR TONY PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	TRANSPORTATION & STREETCARE	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Corporate Plan and budget for 2016-2019 were set at Council on 23 February 2016. The report outlined the need to develop delivery plans during the 2016/17 year to reduce our overall budget envelope over the period to 2019/20 to bridge the budget gap in all years to 2019/20. Policy Committee agreed that a range of budget saving proposals be investigated further on 18 July 2016, including reverting to the standard English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS).
- 1.2 Consultation on the proposal to revert to the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme was carried out during September. This report summarises the results from the consultation and outlines our recommendation to implement the proposed changes to the scheme.
- 1.3 Appendix A - Equality Impact Assessment scoping report for changes to the concessionary fares scheme

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Policy Committee agree to revert to the standard English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) from April 2017 in line with original budget saving proposals.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 On 18 July 2016, Policy Committee approved a range of budget proposals and authorised Officers to undertake public consultation. These proposals included reverting to the standard National English Concessionary Travel Scheme. Consultation was undertaken throughout September 2016.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The online consultation for budget saving proposals took place from 29th August to 30th September 2016 and resulted in the submission of 27 responses in regards to the proposal to revert to the standard English National Concessionary Travel Scheme. A summary of consultation responses is outlined below.

- 4.2 There were 27 responses regarding the proposal to revert to the standard National English Concessionary Travel Scheme. Overall, 15% were supportive of the proposed changes to concessionary travel, 78% of respondents were unsupportive and 7% were unclear. Of these respondents 63% were aged over 65 and would therefore be directly affected by proposed changes. The remaining respondents were 55-64 years (33%) and 25-34 years (4%). Of the 27 respondents, 20 live in Reading Borough and would therefore be affected by the proposed change to the scheme start time and possibly changes to football services. The remaining seven addresses were in Wokingham Borough who would be affected by the football proposals. However it appeared that some Wokingham residents were responding to the start time change on the basis of their infrequent bus service (Route 19).
- 4.7 Of the 27 responses, 15 were unsupportive of the proposals to the change of start time from 09.00 to 09.30. These comments stated that the proposed change of start time would increase costs; affect their ability to catch early off-peak trains; make them late for hospital/doctors' appointments; lessens their enjoyment as they wake early and want to go to town; and result in trips being undertaken by car. Suggestions or alternative options for how this service could be provided included not changing start time; offering a reduced rate for Concessionary travel before 09.30; showing a letter of appointment for early travel; limiting the number of times a concessionary pass can be used; making a charge for a concessionary pass; offering an early Hospital smart card paid by charity and changing bus times.
- 4.8 Six responses were against the proposal to remove concessionary travel from football bus services citing the costs of bus services, the need for outings, including those to football matches. Suggestions for how the service could be provided included Reading Football Club subsidising travel, reducing existing football fares and not changing the scheme. It was also suggested that both proposals could be financed through alternative budgets, such as the ReadyBike subsidy or parking revenue or for fares structures to be reviewed. Other comments for both proposals included potential knock-on effects of the proposals to bus services, such as delays and increased costs.
- 4.9 The 15% of respondents who were supportive of the changes felt that it was fair to expect elderly people to share some of the Council spending cuts.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 Budget saving proposals have been developed to target key areas to ensure we can continue to deliver our priorities and protect services alongside addressing budget challenges. These proposals will continue our focus on our service priorities whilst our budget is being reduced. The proposals will enable us to:

- Remaining financially sustainable to deliver these service priorities.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 The online consultation resulted in the submission of 27 responses in regards to the proposal to revert back to the standard English National Concessionary Travel Scheme. The consultation enabled organisations, service users and the wider community to put forward options on how to reshape the services offered by the enhanced concessionary fare scheme and to comment on who would be affected by the changes and what the likely impacts would be.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2 The equality duty is relevant to the development of the Proposals for Change, including the proposal to revert back to the standard English National Concessionary Travel Scheme. Consultation responses informed an initial Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix A) that highlighted the negative impact on elderly groups of reverting to the standard concessionary fares scheme. However it was felt that the proposed changes were justifiable due to the need to identify budget savings and do not compromise the statutory ENCTS benefits.
- 8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**
- 8.1 There are not expected to be any legal implications.
- 9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**
- 9.1 As reported at Policy Committee on 18 July 2016 the proposals to revert to the National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) would result in budget savings of £59k in 2017/18.
- 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**
- 10.1 Policy Committee 'Budget Proposals 2016-20 to Narrow the Budget Gap' 18 July 2016

Provide basic details

Name of proposal/activity/policy to be assessed

Changes to Concessionary bus pass acceptance

Directorate: DENS

Service: Transportation and Streetcare

Name and job title of person doing the assessment

Name: Stephen Wise

Job Title: Senior Transport Planner

Date of assessment: 2nd November 2016

Scope your proposal

What is the aim of your policy or new service/what changes are you proposing?

To reduce the acceptance of Concessionary bus passes for free travel to the statutory English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) with effect from 1st April 2017. This will specifically remove the additional locally funded discretionary benefits;

1. Free travel from 9am to 9.30am Mondays to Fridays.
2. Free travel on special sports bus services to football and rugby matches

Who will benefit from this proposal and how?

No one will directly benefit from the proposal.

What outcomes does the change aim to achieve and for whom?

The aim is to reduce discretionary council spending in view of the unavailability of future budgets to support this cost.

Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?

The proposal will impact a number of concessionary pass holders who currently travel between 9am and 9.30am Mon-Fri or who travel on special sports bus services. As a free service will no longer be available as noted above, it is assumed that the affected stakeholders will not wish this to happen.

Assess whether an EqIA is Relevant

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than others? (Think about your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc.)

Yes / No (delete as appropriate)

Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Think about your complaints, consultation, and feedback.

Yes / No (delete as appropriate)

If the answer is **Yes** to any of the above you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment.

If **No** you **MUST** complete this statement

An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant because:

Signed (completing officer)

Date

Signed (Lead Officer)

Date

Assess the Impact of the Proposal

Your assessment must include:

- Consultation
- Collection and Assessment of Data
- Judgement about whether the impact is negative or positive

Consultation

How have you consulted with or do you plan to consult with relevant groups and experts. If you haven't already completed a Consultation form do it now. The checklist helps you make sure you follow good consultation practice.

My Home > Info Pods > Community Involvement Pod - Inside Reading Borough Council

Relevant groups/experts	How were/will the views of these groups be obtained	Date when contacted
Concessionary pass holders who travel on buses between 9am and 9.30am or who use their bus pass to travel for free to sports events on special sports bus services.	A consultation took place online following publicity in the printed media and on bus information screens.	A consultation was held from 29 th August to 30 th Sept 2016

Responses to consultation regarding changes to the Concessionary Fares bus pass acceptance.

Consultation took place from 29th August to 30th September 2016.

Question 1: What do you think we should be aware of in terms of how this proposal might impact people?

There were 27 responses of which 15 referred to the move of the start time from 09.00 to 09.30

Comments received that stated this should not be changed referred to the following problems that would be caused for people;

1. Cost (x 2)
 2. People would choose car instead (x2)
 3. Access to station for 09.30 cheap trains to London.
 4. Late for appointments at doctors or hospital etc. (x10)
 5. Lessens people's enjoyment as they wake early and want to go to town.
- 6 people referred to the removal of concessionary travel from football bus services.

Comments were that this should not happen because;

1. Cost of bus (x4)
2. Old people need outings
3. Unfair to pick on football supporters

However there were also 2 responses that could not be discerned as either for or against the changes.

There were 4 responses that supported the proposed changes and felt that it was fair to expect elderly people to share some of the Council spending cuts.

Question 2: If you have any suggestions or alternative options for how this service could be provided please write below.

There were 21 responses 13 of which applied to the change to start times;

1. Don't change start time (x3)
2. Offer a reduced rate for Concessionary travel before 09.30 (x5)
3. Show a letter of appointment for early travel
4. Limit the number of times a concessionary pass can be used
5. Make a charge for a concessionary pass
6. Offer an early Hospital smart card paid by charity
7. Change bus times

4 comments were made regarding football services

1. Football club should subsidise supporter travel
2. Don't change the scheme (x2)
3. Reduce football bus fares to make them generally more affordable.

4 comments were made regarding generally financing the scheme;

1. Scrap Readibike
2. Use car park revenue to subsidise OAP bus travel
- 3.

Question 3: If you would like to make any other comment please write below

There were 14 responses;

Respondents covered a wide range of issues.

May increase costs/not save money (x3), may delay buses, knee jerk funding decision, blamed on government , illegal, pensioners being hit (x3), pensioners should pay their fair share, review bus fare structures (x2), great bus service.

Profile of responders

The age of responders was answered by 27 people who were aged;

25-34 1

55-64 9

65 and over 17

This shows that 63% of those responding would be directly affected by the proposed changes.

There were 27 address post codes given.

Of these 20 were in Reading Borough and would be affected by the proposed change to the scheme start time. They may also be affected by the football proposals.

7 addresses were in Wokingham Borough who would not be affected by changes to scheme start time but would be affected by the football proposals. However it appeared from some of the comments that some Wokingham residents were responding to the start time change on the basis of their infrequent bus service (route 19).

Equality Impact Assessment: Changes to Concessionary bus pass acceptance.

Using information from Census, residents survey data, service monitoring data, satisfaction or complaints, feedback, consultation, research, your knowledge and the knowledge of people in your team, staff groups etc. describe how the proposal could impact on each group. Include both positive and negative impacts.

(Please delete relevant ticks)

Describe how this proposal could impact on Racial groups

This does not impact on Racial groups

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Describe how this proposal could impact on Gender/transgender (cover pregnancy and maternity, marriage)

This does not impact on Gender/transgender.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Describe how this proposal could impact on Disability

Disabled persons using the Access pass are not included in the proposals for changes to the use of concessionary bus passes.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Describe how this proposal could impact on Sexual orientation (cover civil partnership)

This does not impact on sexual orientation.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Describe how this proposal could impact on Age

The proposal to change the hours of acceptance of the Concessionary bus pass and the non-acceptance of concessionary passes on special sports bus services has an impact on Age as the passes are only issued to those who qualify on age grounds.

The proposal to remove the half hour local benefit that allow concessionary pass holders to travel from 9am instead of 9.30am on Mondays to Fridays will impact pass holders ability to travel for free at this time. They will need to either;

1. Travel after 9.30am which may delay then getting to appointments. However for the majority of concessionary pass journeys this delay will have no effect.

2. Pay the commercial bus fare to travel at anytime before 9.30am. Concessionary pass holders already have to pay the commercial fare if they wish to travel before 9am so for the majority of Concessionary pass holders the difference is unlikely to be very significant.

The proposal to discontinue acceptance of concessionary passes for free travel on special sports bus services (specifically to football and rugby matches) will impact pass holders ability to travel for free on these bus services. They will need to either:

1. Consider their own travel arrangements and whether they wish to continue to travel to sports events by special sports bus services. They may consider that there are other more suitable alternatives which may offer better value for money.

2. Pay the commercial bus fare on the special sports bus services.

Both of the proposals will remove a locally funded discretionary element which is currently offered in addition to the statutory English National Concessionary Travel Scheme. Reading Borough Council's commitment to the full statutory scheme is unaffected by the proposals.

Is there a negative impact?

Yes

No

Not sure

Describe how this proposal could impact on Religious belief?

This does not impact on religious belief.

Is there a negative impact?

Yes

No

Not sure

Make a Decision

If the impact is negative then you must consider whether you can legally justify it. If not you must set out how you will reduce or eliminate the impact. If you are not sure what the impact will be you **MUST** assume that there could be a negative impact. You may have to do further consultation or test out your proposal and monitor the impact before full implementation.

Tick which applies (Please delete relevant ticks)

1. ~~No negative impact identified~~ ~~Go to sign off~~

2. **Negative impact identified but there is a justifiable reason**

You must give due regard or weight but this does not necessarily mean that the equality duty overrides other clearly conflicting statutory duties that you must comply with.

Reason

The proposal to remove locally funded discretionary elements offered in addition to the statutory ENCTS benefits is intended to help save Reading Borough Council money which it no longer has available in its budgets going forwards.

The impacts on elderly people who enjoy the benefits of using their concessionary bus pass are relatively limited and do not compromise the intentions or rules of the ENCTS.

3. **Negative impact identified or uncertain**

What action will you take to eliminate or reduce the impact? Set out your actions and timescale?

One suggestion made in responses to the consultation undertaken as part of the proposals was to offer concessionary pass holders a 'concessionary rate' on buses either before 9.30am when the free use starts, or for use of special sports buses, or both.

The reasoning was that by offering a special 'concessionary rate' the financial burden would be reduced for pass holders, the bus company would gain a cash fare and Reading Borough Council would avoid having to reimburse the bus company for a free journey.

Reading Borough Council cannot legally demand that a bus company offers such a special 'concessionary rate' but can instigate discussions with bus

companies such that they may consider this course of action to be worthwhile.

Reading Borough Council would seek such discussions at the earliest opportunity so that the existence or otherwise of such a scheme can be publicised before the start of the change to free acceptance of concessionary passes.

How will you monitor for adverse impact in the future?

Reading Borough Council will monitor feedback comments from elderly ENCTS pass users so as to assess the impacts of the decisions for future consideration.

Signed (completing officer)

[Signature]
[Signature]

Date Nov 2016

Signed (Lead Officer)

Date Nov 2016